

Equity, Efficiency and Excellence: Improving the achievement of low-performing students in East Asian Countries

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Student achievement in Asian countries is ranked on the top worldwide; however, student achievement gap in many of these countries is also higher than world average. Facing limited resources, policy makers often have to choose between “pursuing excellence while sacrificing equity” or “pursuing equity but accept mediocrity.” Nevertheless, these worldwide student assessments also give good examples for a case in which equity does not need to be given up in the pursuit of educational excellence. Rather, when resources are allocated to the aspects where changes are most likely—i.e., disadvantage and low-performing students, the dilemma may be overcome. This paper argues that Asian countries should strive in improving the achievements of disadvantage or low-performing students. This is not only policy imperative of these countries, but also the most efficient way of allocating limited resources. Proposed reform for improving achievements of these students will be recommended, so that equity, efficiency and excellence can be met at the same time.